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ABSTRACT

This study explored some of the impacts of the presence of others on the most intimate human relationships: those of couples and parents and children in communal households. The shift from essentially dyadic to larger group relations in the home adds a number of complex phenomena: audiences, alternative resources, coalition partners, interventions, and political jockeying. In each kind of relationship the primary tie may remain central for many people while they balance availability and responsibility to the others. There are both greater opportunities for wider intimacy, more ties, sharing of chores and responsibilities, autonomy, and egalitarianism and a series of new issues with which couples, parents, and children must cope. (Author)

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Coupling, Parenting, and the Presence of Others: Intimate Relationships in Communal Households

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What happens to the most intimate human ties when the territory of the relationship is shared with others? What happens to couple and parent-child relationships in the presence of other adults who have equal claims on the household? What is the structure of the environment for couples, parents, and children when family space is public rather than private, when others are present as audiences, claimants on the intimate territory, and sources of competing ties? We have studied urban communal households -- domestic collectives -- in an attempt to answer these questions about the nature of important relationships in the presence of others. Rather than focusing on the group as the unit of interest, then, we are focussing on how specific relationships are affected and changed by sharing a household with other adults. Although the setting for this research is a particular kind of family experiment in the 1970's, many of the results can be generalized to any situation in which outsiders are present in the intimate space of a relationship, whether the "others" are relatives, boarders, close friends, or professionals such as family therapists. The study of relationships "in the presence of others" also highlights, by contrast, a variety of taken-for-granted family dynamics.

The major effects can be summarized as a shift in the locus of social control. When relationships are conducted in the presence of "others," couples and parents experience a loss of control, both over their territory and over their partner. The "others" change the relationship by their presence as an audience, direct intervention, their availability as potential coalition partners, and their claims over the intimate space. Couples experience pressures toward individuation, autonomy, and egalitarianism, as well as a loss of sovereignty. Parents experience diminishing abilities to make and enforce rules and increased self-consciousness about child rearing, as well as important help in many of the tasks of parenting. Children, of ages 5-11, who gain additional adult relationships, are also the recipients of increased rule making by other adults. And, paradoxically, while both couples and parents report a loss of control, they still tend to have more power in the household than other adults uninvolved in relationships, so that while they report their lack of control, other household members report the "unfair" control of people in couple or parent-child relationships.

Our research involved field work, interviews, and instrumented data collection with members of 35 urban and suburban communal households in the Boston and New Haven areas since March 1972, 15 of which include children under 12. Single people outnumbered both couples and parent-child units, with few households containing more than one couple or one parent. (A majority of the parents were single parents, thus making the analysis of the parent-child relationship in communal houses as a "dyad with others present" even more meaningful.) The culture of the households was solidly avant-garde middle class rather than hippie or student. They were generally located in large old houses in middle class areas, with relatively few in hip-bohemian-student areas of the city. Mean household size was 9.6. Interviewed in depth were couples, parents, and children who had lived in a private household at least six months before beginning to live communally; most of the couples studied were married.

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Georg Simmel's work on the significance of numbers for social life and theories of coalition formation which derived from it, provides one framework for understanding the significance of the "presence of others" (Simmel, 1950: Caplow, 1968). Simmel asserted that a dyadic relationship is completely different in form from a relationship between three or more people (and, in fact, that the change from two to three-or-more parties is one of the most significant numerical leaps). The two-person relationship is a union of opposites, two complementary and unique parts coming together; its solidarity may come to depend upon a division of properties such that each person experiences his own incompleteness without the contribution of the other. Each one constitutes the relationship; it would not exist if either one left. The person least involved may have the most power, according to the "theory of least interest" derived from this analysis, because if either person leaves, the relationship by definition ends. Each person is a majority, so the power pattern is normally one of dominance-submission. Equality is hard to achieve if there are two opposing interests clashing.

With the introduction of a third person, the relationship may drastically alter. The third party provides an audience for the initial dyad and merely by watching may alter the relationship in a number of ways: by serving as a representative of "society" or interests beyond the dyad (a reminder of social norms), and thereby increasing the self-consciousness of the pair as they interact and increasing the pressure for image-maintenance; by serving as a witness and potential swing vote should the dyad engage in dispute; and by becoming privy to "family secrets," thereby reducing the space in which one important solidifier of relationships can be maintained. As coalition theory suggests, a third party also makes possible coalitions and power blocs other than the original couple, thus dramatically altering the power structure, since it is now possible for any two to form a coalition against any third person or one person to set another two against one another. Power cannot as easily be unilaterally exercised by one dyad member over another because of the threat of third party intervention or the forming of a superior coalition with the victim.

The nature of group dynamics differs in additional ways in three-person versus two-person groups. Relations of three or more, Simmel theorized, are based on what members have in common rather than their unique properties, emphasizing a union of commonality instead of the union of opposites of the dyad and de-emphasizing polarization. Finally, Simmel proposed that relations of three or more have a "superindividual" reality such that any one of the members can leave but the relationship, the unit, the group, will still exist. Unlike the situation of the dyad, members can be replaced without totally changing the unit's character. The three-person group is thus theoretically immortal, and the "principle of least interest" that gives power to the member threatening withdrawal is no longer automatically operative.

If the larger group is a potential threat to the freedom, sovereignty, power configuration, and division of properties of the dyad as an exclusive and excluding relationship, the two-person intimate alliance may also be a potential threat to the solidarity of the larger group. Several analyses suggest that, particularly

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when the need or desire for collective commitment to "superindividual" entities is high, exclusive relationships such as couples and parent-child bonds may threaten the group because they represent competition for members' emotional energy and loyalty; because they may be self-sufficient in themselves, not needing the group and leaving it behind, withdrawing their resources and shutting others out; and because they may represent a natural power bloc within the group with the advantage in coalition formation of easier access to and knowledge of one another (Kanter, 1972: 86-7; Slater, 1963; Coser, 1974). When things are difficult in a group, people in committed sub-group relationships may also have the advantage over nonrelated people because they do not "need" the total group to the same extent; such inequalities may threaten group cohesion and satisfactory resolution of the dispute. In a variety of past and present communes, for example, groups developed a number of practices to reduce the importance of biological family ties and increase the number of functions served by the whole group rather than the small unit (Kanter, 1972, 1973). Philip Slater (1963) has described the mechanisms by which society in general intrudes on couples and families, reasserting control over them and pulling them back into the social fabric when they threaten withdrawal and secret behavior free of social constraints.

Thus, intervention into the relationship of a couple or parent-and-child may not only be made possible by the presence of others but may also be actively sought by the others in order to reduce the threat of dyadic withdrawal and maintain the cohesiveness of the larger unit all comprise. Several propositions follow. For example, to help out one dyad member with a responsibility involving the other is also a way of intervening in the relationship and indicating the potential replaceability of a partner, thus undercutting both the exclusiveness and the self-sufficiency of the dyad. In collective households, then, the amount of helping people do with each other's needs and obligations, from babysitting to providing company while the partner is out, serves both a manifest function of reducing burdens and a latent function of helping prevent dyadic withdrawal. Further, we can propose that when others intervene in a dyadic relationship, they are likely to try to maximize keeping both members actively available to the group -- supporting the weaker member against the stronger so that the stronger won't "destroy" the weaker, and supporting the one who is being pulled into withdrawing against the one who is pulling. Finally, when collective commitment is important and the dyad is not necessary as a fundamental building block of the collective, we can propose that when third parties serve as audiences representing social norms, the norms of which they remind the pair are likely to be norms against dyad unity and fusion.

This theoretical overview makes apparent a fundamental assymmetry between how dyad members and third parties would view their joint relationship in a three-or-more person group. While pair members may experience the loss of control over their relationship and joint space and the control of third parties, the "others" may themselves feel out of control of the situation in the presence of the "natural coalitions." Paradoxically, while dyad members may feel they do not have enough power in the presence of others, the others may see them as too powerful. While dyad members may feel they give up control, the others may instead feel they take control. This situation engenders a number of tensions in the group and an

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atmosphere in which dyad members are continually aware of working on contradictions and balancing pulls.

The analysis thus far is relevant to any relationship of three-or-more roughly equal participants containing committed dyads. But we suggest that these phenomena are exaggerated in communal households and therefore more visible. First, urban communal households intentionally develop a public character that makes others potentially present for generally all family events but sleeping, sexual intercourse, and bathroom use. Group members also have access to and claims on all household territory except a member's single private room (and sometimes even that place if the door is not closed or the resident not present). For example:

> The "publicness" of family[relationships]is reflected in the way communes use space...The bedroom, a private single-functioned preserve in the ideal-typical one-family household, becomes a multi-purposed room for sleeping, working, and individual entertainment, since each member has only one private room. Because all members are free to invite guests, if not to the common rooms, then always to their own, no individual [or unit] can control the flow of people in and out of the house... visitors[sometimes]respond to the public character of the house by treating it less like a home than like a museum...or a hotel... (Kanter, 1974: 38).

Secondly, communal households generally stress negotiated as opposed to institutionalized norms. Since there are few precedents for organizing collective households and often explicit values favoring shared power, members must come together in a period of initial chaos, high expectations, and sometimes conflict and confusion, to create a household organization. House meetings at weekly or biweekly intervals are often the first process established. Every household in our study had regular meetings to explicitly consider group issues and a norm prohibiting unilateral decisions about issues affecting others in the group; in some cases a person would not invite a dinner guest without "checking with" the others. The emphasis on negotiation -- which we suggest will be characteristic of most families in the future -- stems from the ideology of alternative families as well as the structural consequences of joint residence by many equal, unrelated adults. House meetings and other public negotiations aid shared power and meeting on common ground (even if there are age or resource differences) and create frequent situations in which members may influence each others' behavior and decisions and intervene in each others' affairs. The existence of egalitarian norms means that when others intervene in a dyad they are as likely to support the weaker as the stronger member.

Finally, the household's division of labor is also the result of an explicit small group negotiation process. It is likely to be determined on the basis of fair sharing of the load rather than skill or ascribed characteristics, and it is likely to involve every member, often including children, as an individual rather than as a member of a unit. (Job sharing, indeed, is another way in which collective commitment can be enhanced. See Kanter, 1972.) This and other structural and other ideological characteristics of communal households increase and channel the effects of the "presence of others" on couples and parents.

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COUPLES: DIMINISHED SOVEREIGNTY

When a couple moves from their own place into a public household, their initial experience is a loss of power and sovereignty, combined with an opening up of their relationship to others. Since the couple members are not the sole proprietors of the house, they have less autonomy, privacy, power and freedom to set rules than if they lived alone. This can be stressful, but some people also find it a positive experience, especially if it is in line with one's ideology, as it was for this woman:

> I learned a lot about sharing. I had lived five years in a couple and had really got into some privatistic things. Control things like always knowing what's in the refrigerator; little things that psychologically make a lot of difference. Taking control of the house and knowing what had to be done, and planning around that. At first it was difficult for me to lose that control, although it was also liberating. I sometimes didn't have input into what we ate, which brought back bad memories of my parents' house. Or we would get a lot of magazines, which we would save. But in the commune they would get lost, and I had to change my feelings about those pieces of property.

As a subunit of the house, one's couple is not identical with the whole, but is subject to observation, as well as checks and balances by other people.

Having an audience can be disconcerting at first, as this man felt:

> I wasn't convinced that I wanted to have other people observing my idiosyncracies and challenging me, wondering aloud why I did x or y. Suddenly all of my routines were subject to scrutiny, things that the other member of the couple would just let by. Like my fixing everything in the house, which would now become issues, because suddenly it wasn't my house. I didn't have to be responsible for everything, because others wanted to know how to take care of the house too. So in the process we started to question these roles.

The audience alters the way one deals with a mate as well. One person reported that in his nuclear household he could go on a unilateral strike, as by refusing to talk to the other in the face of repeated demands to take out the garbage. In a communal household, the presence of an audience witnessing this "childish" behavior and to step in the breach, potentially isolating the aggressor, makes this strategy less effective.

In a communal household, couple members cannot control all inputs and outputs for themselves and each other -- whether material or emotional. This makes the couple boundary more permeable and intimacy more diffused. The limited exchange of interpersonal goods and services within the couple is replaced by a marketplace, in which different possible relationships and experiences are available from a variety of others. Some of the couples were at a stage where they felt their relationships were becoming stale, boring, routine and depressing. New people represented an injection of

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energy, and forced them to re-evaluate their relationship, as these men found:

> I was in a typical position -- peaceful coexistence, some liking, respect, some things like the kids shared. It was easy to keep going forever. The commune forced me to make a frontal assault on that, the most important thing I ever did in my life.

> Initially I had two distinct feelings. First that I was losing my family. I was afraid of that. I liked the family set-up, the closeness to the children. I felt the nuclear feeling, closeness, was going to be gone forever, and that has turned out to be true. The other feeling was one of camaraderie. Here were people I loved setting out on a frightening, glamorous, together thing. We had a chance of really experiencing close friendship we couldn't get in other ways. So there was fear and optimism at the start.

Almost every couple interviewed remarked that living collectively resulted in their learning that if and when their mate cannot meet a particular need, there are others who can. They find that many of the conflicts they had as a nuclear couple are less intense, because the other no longer represents a unique and irreplaceable resource. This both takes pressure off their relationship, and decreases its intensity -- a potential gain and a potential cost. As part of a larger collectivity, the couple members are permeable to outside inputs, feedback, and new relationships and experiences, the effects of which we will explore later. For example:

> The commune seemed to be a way of stretching the relationship, to expand the contacts and close relationships we had. We felt it would be easier and more intense in a commune. The process of living together forced more of that kind of intimacy that you just don't get with the friends you visit.

> The commune seemed like just what we needed to fill what wasn't there. I felt we would become closer together by sharing it. I was also aware of feeling that if things didn't work out that it would be easier for me to leave, that it wouldn't leave a gaping hole in the family. It would be a pressure cooker, supercharger, outside stimulus to precipitate what would happen. We felt our marriage was resting too much on its institutional character; we came home to each other because we were married and pressured, and we wanted to enter an environment where the pressure didn't mean so much, so we could reconstruct the relationship as valid on the basis of a day-to-day choice.

The loss of sovereignty and opening up to new relationships that couples experience creates an element of risk, a risk which is not shared by single commune members. Since the commune upsets the balance of the relationship, opening it up to new inputs and sources of control, and diffusing the focus of couple members on each other for gratification, one is testing the relationship when one enters a commune. There is always the possibility that the relationship will be totally replaced, or cease to be useful within a communal context.

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Some of the boundaries to outside involvement and against sharing space with others in the nuclear family can be interpreted as protections against temptation and change. The commune removes these barriers, and a relationship that cannot stand comparison will probably not stand up to communal living. This factor probably accounts for the high number of couples who split up within the first few months of communal living (nearly 50%) and the very low number of splits that occur later (Jaffe and Kanter, 1975). Couple members who split up after moving into a commune usually report that the commune hastened or catalyzed a seemingly inevitable process, or gave them the support to leave the relationship or invest in new ones. An empty shell couple has little reason to remain together within a commune.

Interventions and coalitions: heightened conflict expression

Other household members are present to both actively intervene or to form supportive coalitions with one member of the couple; in both cases there is opportunity and pressure for the couple member to open up conflicts. It is assumed that others can legitimately intervene in a couple conflict to the extent that the tension between partners affects the atmosphere for those living with them; sometimes this is helpful to couples who traditionally bury conflict. Said one woman:

> When there's other people around, you can express that conflict, your difficulty, whereas when there's just the two of you you have these old patterns, like you get angry and it doesn't affect anyone else, you're just angry for a couple of days, and the other person learns to ignore it. You don't talk about it or try to realize what's making you angry. When you're living with other people they are affected by it so you have to be more critical about what's happening to you emotionally, and the effects of your behavior on other people.

In many groups, couple issues that cause strain for others are resolved either by house members talking to the couple privately, or being sought out as mediators by the couple. In this way they offer feedback, make their own feelings known, and suggest possibilities that take both the couple and the other house members into account. Many couples reported having used a house member to mediate a conflict, and in houses that have been together for a while usually have a norm that if something is affecting house members, it can be brought up as a house issue. Couples who feel that their relationship is only their business are usually those who withdraw from the house in other ways, and soon move out of communal settings. Other houses find ways of bringing up couple issues in house forums or in smaller spontaneous gatherings, based on trust and ties between the members. The use of housemates to mediate couple conflicts creates role obligations on the mediators, but they are usually people who feel closely tied to the couple, and feel that such conflict mediation is the kind of obligation one house member ought to take on. Indeed, one of the ways that members may evaluate the state of their household is by how openly they can deal with such personal issues.

Conflict expression and seeking support outside the couple is facilitated by living with others of one's own sex, since same-sex coalitions are more-or-less "natural" alliances (Caplow, 1968).

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Almost all of the people we interviewed had been affected by the women's movement, especially its aim to allow women to gain a sense of themselves by breaking down a woman's identification with her man. Most of the women in communes, and many of the men, have been in women's or men's consciousness raising groups, and through such groups they learn to identify and seek support from people of their own sex, which breaks down dependency on one's mate for such support. Many of the communes had women's groups, meeting intermittently or regularly. One commune separated its house meetings into men's and women's groups. The women began to talk about how the married and single women were competitive and jealous, and how this inhibited their closeness because they were still into societal roles of either protecting their men or feeling bad because they didn't have men. The men, meanwhile, had to deal with the ways in which they used women to deal with feelings, to bring up issues around feelings and generally to keep the social life of the house together. They began to take initiative around these areas, discussed problems in their couples, and began to do things together.

Pressure for individuation and autonomy

Within a traditional nuclear family, the superindividual unit "family" may be more important than the individuals, and every effort may be bent toward maintaining it. The breakup of a couple threatens the root of a family, whose members are not replaceable. In the commune a member can be replaced, and if a parent or member of a couple leaves, while that might be a crisis for a time, the remaining people can exist as a community. Since there are usually single people, and since almost everything from decision making to task allocation is expressed in terms of individuals, one of the major effects of a communal environment on a couple seems to be that it shifts their definition of themselves from being "part of a couple" to "individual member of the commune." Couple members thus lose control over their partner at the same time that they lose their special couple sovereignty over their household.

This changes both the way each member of the couple sees themself and the way they behave. Couple members reported that previous to living communally they felt treated as an inseparable twosome: they were viewed as part of a couple, rarely went places or maintained friends alone, the wife expected to identify and gain status not from her own but her husband's achievements, and the two were taken as a single conversational unit, in which the opinion of one was assumed to stand for both. Several couples mentioned the difficulty of keeping single friends, the norm being you have another couple over for dinner and maintain a very structured relationship with them, rather than drop in or maintain individual friendships. One woman mentioned that she felt guilty if she went out, because she would be leaving her husband alone to babysit. Also, many traditional couples have a norm that they cannot disagree or neglect to support the other person in the presence of others, even though they may later disagree violently.

The communal house seems to reverse each of these fusing processes, by structurally reinforcing the autonomy and individuality of each member of the couple. Couple members feel freer to come and go, develop relationships, and act without their mate. For example, if one member of a couple is at work, the other who might be in the commune with the children will be relating individually to other

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commune members. People can go out without feeling that their mate will be all alone, so there is no longer pressure, for example, to go to movies or concerts or parties which one does not care for, just because the mate is going. Of course this process does not go smoothly. For example, in one house a wife mentioned that there was a huge argument when she came home, and saw her husband in intense conversation with another woman. When he did not immediately come up to join her she became angry. But they both feel that since that fight, which occurred in the first months of communal living, they have begun to moderate and move away from such possessiveness, which they define negatively. The next summer, the husband spent weekdays away from the commune working in the country, while the wife organized a women's conference with other women at the house.

One husband talked about the change in their relationship, which occurred in the year they began to live communally, after many years of very traditional marriage and child rearing:

> We began more and more doing things on a completely individual basis, following our interests whether or not they include the other. Like, quite recently the weekly women's meeting began, and Elaine has had long talks and strong friendships with people here that don't involve me. After a house meeting, she likes to talk with someone about what happened and her feelings, while I had very little patience with that sort of thing, feeling that when it's over, it's over. Each of us have more individual friends in the community, rather than we as a couple have the couple down the block over for dinner. Before, if it wasn't on a couple basis it didn't work. This has also gone beyond the community: Elaine likes people in town that I don't care for, and she visits them. To a lesser extent so do I, and it's fine and acceptable, as she's more gregarious than I. We are two individuals who are also married and have a relationship to each other. The biggest change is this recognition of each of our individual lives outside of our relationship. I have recognized that there is less of my life tied up with her, whereas before I was married 24 hours a day, my entire life was in relation to her, whether something was happening or it wasn't. Now there are parts of my life that she doesn't enter.

As a couple they have had conflicts over her feeling that he puts his relationship to the community above her -- something he admitted and tried to moderate. He felt that they had been at a point where they had little in common, and now that they recognize their separateness, they can also recognize what they share.

Another woman expresses the consequences of separating out one's own personal identity from the couple:

> Living communally I've begun to recognize that my socialization has caused me to feel things like I'm responsible for John's happiness. If I were a good wife he would be successful and I would be backing him. He would never feel depressed or unhappy. But now I feel that I have my life and there are things that I need to do, to make myself feel good, and he has to do the same for himself. We're two separate people and the best thing for us as a couple is that we be content with what we do as individuals.

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> I wouldn't have believed that or been able to act on it before. And you don't just begin to think like that in one day. Every day your socialization comes in conflict with it.

Communal households reinforce individuation by making membership and citizenship available only to individuals. Each person joins individually, and usually states individual reasons for wanting to join. When a house member forms a couple with someone outside, it is never automatically expected that the new person will move in; the new person must ask for membership individually, or in one household, has the special status of "consort" until he or she becomes a member. There is also pressure for couple members to make decisions and participate in house meetings individually. As people get to know them individually, and under the conflictual lens of house meetings, the facade of couple agreement can no longer be maintained. Many house members talked about how they welcomed times when one member of a couple was away, because that was a way of getting to know the other person separately. Couple members likewise valued time around the house when their mate was absent, as a time for forming individual relationships to others. Couple members reported that when they behaved as a traditional couple -- sitting together at meals, performing house duties for each other, always agreeing, cutting each other off in conversation, or immediately going to the mate when they come home, expecting them to stop what they are doing -- they are apt to be confronted by others, who feel left out or uncomfortable at such closed boundaries.

At the extreme pole of individuation lies the couple that substitutes membership in the community for couple membership. Although only a few couples reported that they joined communes with the intention of making the relationship to the commune primary, simply drifting away from a couple relationship is one possible consequence of individuation. A woman tells of how she moved out of an unfulfilling couple:

> Al was particularly concerned with privacy when we were having a discussion or argument or anything personal between us. Much more so than I. And he didn't really want to go into the conflicts we were having, but just to sweep them under the rug. Since both of us were pretty involved in community things it became harder to nourish our relationship. We didn't work at it hard enough. Our expectations and our interests diverged. We looked in the community to each follow our separate interests, so we didn't have to share. That was happening so nicely that we were spending less and less time together. Our time together would be with other people around so it wasn't time for us but for community, and didn't help our relationship. It became a substitute for the relationship.

Each of them eventually became involved with other people who more closely shared their interests. She spent a summer traveling, and then returned and took a separate bedroom. Neither of them felt an immediate need to resolve their relationship, which existed in a state of separateness and ambiguity until a year later, when they formally acknowledged their separation as a permanent

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fact, and began living with other people.

This is just one extreme example of how communal settings may even support a complete severing of the relationship: one may remain part of a "family" while leaving a couple, continuing the relationship to the group. In many houses each individual has his or her own room, so that in some cases a split does not even necessitate a room change. There were several instances where both members of the former couple remained in the house after severing their relationship, though not without tension, usually cases of unmarried couples or couples that form between two previously single commune members.

Pressure for egalitarian relationships

While the pursuit of autonomy and stress on individuation is a force toward equality, there are additional ways in which the structure of the urban communal household promotes male/female equality and a decrease of sex role differentiation among couples. Ideology supports structure: all the communes we studied are explicitly against male dominance (in contrast to some spiritual and rural communes), and are actively trying to equalize sex role related behavior around the house (see Kanter and Halter, 1973). A communal household does not automatically allow the institutionalized slipping into complementary roles and functions -- a rigid division of labor based on sex -- which can easily occur between two people whose relationship may depend on such division. In many cases neither member of the couple likes housework, and the communal environment decreases the total amount of work each person must do, so that "oppression" of the female via unwanted housework is not simply replaced by male drudgery. Also, people report that many people working together cleaning the house for a few hours a week is more pleasant than working alone. There is less work for all, so when men are asked to participate the demands are not so onerous. The group negotiation process also makes it difficult to maintain a sex-related division of labor. One man reported:

> Sex roles have become less important here. People all do certain things and the roles are becoming less and less defined. Some women like to work around the house, and all the men help cook, and clean. It wasn't so for us before. I worked and she took care of the kids. At times I took over some of what I always considered to be "her" work. Now I don't see it as hers any more, we simply help each other. I never did much cooking, but here I do it regularly. It is my contribution to the community rather than me giving her a hand, which incidentally, I always needed to be thanked for, because I was doing a favor, something I didn't have to do.

The presence of a same sex reference group enables many groups to resolve couple role conflicts in favor of greater sharing and equality. The formal or informal women's and occasional men's group in or around many of the households became a formidable force for pointing out inequalities, and implementing strategies for eradicating them. Such support groups enable women and sometimes men to define priorities for change, create

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and try out strategies, compare notes, and make demands out of knowledge that others have the same feelings, are doing the same things, and will support their right to do it.

Many groups use the word "struggle" in connection with this process of sex role redefinition among couples, and in general among men and women living together. They use group meetings to deal critically with the meaning of equality, to give feedback to others who are not aware of the implications or meaning of their behavior, or are not changing in ways that the house had agreed to. Thus, in contrast to more private households in which sex role behavior is not observed by others, and consequently not subject to much social control, change of behavior in a communal setting can be monitored constantly. Couples who might have difficulty resolving sex role conflict, or might agree in principle but argue over pathways toward their goals, now participate in a forum which clarifies goals and has data about day-to-day behavior, and can judge the degree to which they are met.

One account by a male couple member illustrates the way pressures for egalitarianism, individuation, conflict expression, and the intervention of others converged:

> Through the summer we all moved in and all hell broke loose. Couple stuff was openly shared. All sorts of angry confrontations about male chauvinism. We had houseguests who were in the women's movement. All of a sudden there were a lot of women's movement heavies at a time when there were a lot of angry women around. Anger became a house dynamic, and a lot of it was justified. We made a contract on moving in to have a weekly housemeeting, which would deal with emotional confrontation, annoyances, grievances, whatever people felt toward each other. We had them more than weekly, some lasting all night, whenever something happened. Our house became famous as the "house that struggles," constantly. For instance a fight between a couple might end up with sorting out who did what to whom. Helen might feel that she was trying to be independent and Richard was trying to hang on to her, while he would be feeling that she was not accepting him and meeting his needs. Both had legitimate gripes, that came out hostilely, and the rest would decide what was really happening and deflect those hostile jibes. I tend to remember incidents where I thought the women were off the wall, like an argument that broke out when Richard had to go out to a dangerous neighborhood late at night and asked me to come along, since I was a judo expert. The women freaked out that he had asked a man, but I still maintain that I had a necessary skill. I feel that shouldn't be used to hide basically chauvinist assumptions, if they exist, but in this I felt they went overboard. There was also an issue of men not giving the women "hearing validity," not hearing something a woman said, until a man said it. The women didn't feel listened to, and there was some truth to that. It was an extremely valuable, painful growth experience for all of us, lasting 1 1/2 years. Our house was one of the only ones at the time where men and women struggled together. Couples were breaking up right and left, and there was pressure on the women

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to leave, but we worked it out together.

Now there is less confrontation, and all involved feel a deep basic support and understanding of each other, with less need to struggle. The transition point has been passed.

Couple Power and Couple Boundaries

Although couple members experience a loss of control, they may still end up with more power than single people in a communal household. Couples retain some control over their own relationship, and there are several ways in which their existence as a couple (particularly in the majority of houses which are largely populated by single people) can gain them disproportionate power.

In some groups, for example, there is a "first family," a couple that takes on some characteristics of a set of parents. They may attain such status because they own the house, or initiated the household, or because they are the oldest members (in age or time lived communally), or simply because they are the only couple. Such "parent trips" in communal households are often a source of conflict and difficulty. Incidents such as the male member of the only married couple handling all the financial affairs, with the others periodically complaining about this but not initiating an alternate plan, demonstrate the tendency for communes to break down into conventional sex role behavior, despite ambivalence about it. Thus, in some houses the existence of a parental couple is a source of comfort, with members differentially seeking them out for advice and support, while in others "parent trip" is an accusation, a protest against the real and imagined authority of a couple. The symbolic role of a couple, especially one with children, is such that members of a couple were routinely the most influential in their communes.

Couples have the advantage of not needing the group for emotional sustenance to the same extent that others may; couple "withdrawal" is thus often a reality as well as a threat. Couples may often experience their communal life as a fluctuation between periods of withdrawal into nearly exclusive focus on their couple relationship, and periods of involvement in community activities such that the couple is nearly absorbed into the household, with each member pursuing his or her own activities. The other members would obviously prefer the latter pole, but due to threat, preference or mutual commitment, couple members often feel they have to withdraw into the couple, forming in a sense a mini-nuclear family within the group.

Couple withdrawal is especially threatening in households where there are single people who do not have the option of withdrawing into a couple for emotional support or relief from the community. According to one woman in a couple:

> For us, a couple, the commune was wonderful, a dream. It was shitty for single people. There were only two of them. The other couple were having problems, so they became sort of clingy when they were together. Sharon had her insecurities and not being in a couple heightened that, and there was no way to deal with that. Single people don't enjoy it. You have

> an issue that you talk about around the table that's really heavy, and then I could go back to the bedroom and talk with Ron, so I have three hours of support to work it through. Sharon would have no idea even what the issues are and no support. Sometimes she hears about the issue, but mostly she doesn't know whether because of privacy or simply time. So I have double support. The upshot is that Sharon will live in a woman's house next year.

In several houses which contained two couples and a fifth single person, that person was always peripheral to the community, feeling lonely and usually developing an outside relationship and having a very low commitment to the commune.

Couples in communal settings also derive power from the ways in which they maintain their boundaries and thus exclude others. The couples we studied set limits to the diffusion of intimacy. While there are many needs that others can satisfy, and there are many ways in which the intimacy of the community are expressed, multiple sexual relationships are hard to maintain, and are a regular part of very few of the communes we studied. Our findings contradict the media view of sexual libertarianism being a central feature, at least of urban communes. Nearly all of our communes show a preference for couple members not developing sexual relationships with their housemates. The reasons are more pragmatic than puritan; the houses that have experienced such relationships tend to break up fairly quickly (or the couples participating in the multiple relationships split up) or else they institute a house incest taboo for couple members. Nearly all the couples interviewed sanction and have experienced extramarital sexual involvements, usually attended by conflict and tension. And many of the communes and many of the couples have had episodic relationships with other commune members, usually early in the life of the commune. But they eventually feel that maintaining such relationships presents insurmountable problems (see Jaffe and Kanter, 1975). After a while most groups develop an "incest taboo," which seems to be a source of stability, and sexual experimentation for couples occurs largely outside the commune. Similarly, single people who attempt multiple relationships within a commune seem to drift into couple relationships. At present it seems that the family-like intimacy that is the goal of communes does not include shared sexual relationships, probably because the jealousy and comparisons which occur tend to disrupt the weaker of the relationships even more dramatically than other forms of sharing, leading to one of the participants leaving the commune.

The couple may also maintain other limits: emotional and informational as well as sexual shared "secrets" and private knowledge, including the knowledge that stems from private discussions behind closed doors, are important mechanisms of exclusiveness and solidarity. Couple members generally have several sources of intentional and unintentional private knowledge such as how the other feels about an issue before it is openly discussed; they may also have a longer shared history. Their knowledge of each other -- sexual, psychological, biographical -- is generally greater than that of other members. And couples may also deliberately generate their own "secrets."

While the other members are privy to much of the couple's personal and emotional life, the traditional norm against a couple discussing their relationship with outsiders, or when one member does, for the outsider to feign ignorance, still looms large in many communal houses. In only a few households, primarily those with a radical feminist orientation and those having several couples, do couple members make a commitment to be open with the commune about conflicts and issues within their relationship. Maintaining the confidentiality of the couple seems to be a homeostatic mechansim, which is usually broken only in times of great stress and conflict. For example, in one commune it was obvious that one of the couples had a very traditional relationship in which the woman was passive, dependent and powerless, but this was never mentioned openly. Then, another woman in the commune got into a conflict with the male member of that couple around his disrespect for her own autonomy and dismissal of her as a person, which in turn exposed both weakness and strain in his couple relationship, and led to a process which eventually ended in the woman receiving support from the other members of the house to ask her mate to leave.

But usually the process of becoming aware of a couple's relationship is more circuitous, and extends the stress that the couple is under to other members of the house. Either the couple gives out signs of stress, depression or anger, such as by making biting comments or not doing their housework, or else one member of the couple may seek out another house member. (Interestingly, both men and women in couples tend to confide in other women, perpetuating another sex role related dynamic.) The other person is then in the difficult situation of knowing something, yet facing a norm against communicating either their knowledge or their own feelings of helplessness or discomfort. This may cause strain for the whole community. For example, in one group most people were aware of a man's involvement with a woman outside the house. But he said that he wanted to handle the issue with his wife privately, and the others, unsure what she knew and how to approach it given his ambiguous message, had to tread on eggshells around it.

Finally, when it will help a couple gain its private ends, couples may approach the rest of the group as a power "bloc." The couple has several weapons: to claim superior "need" to the extent that more people or more complex situations are involved; to threaten withdrawal (emotional or physical) if the group is not responsive to couple demands -- we have observed both kinds of behavior. Such levers may enable the couple to gain privileges or concession, as when couples routinely claim the best rooms or have more influence over guest policy. The threat of withdrawal can be both an angry gesture when the community does not meet expectation, or a defensive reaction to the stress or risk which full participation in the group entails. Couples have the knowledge that if they maintain some of their own boundaries, they can always simply reform their isolated unit, excluding the others, when things go poorly.

Much of the behavior of others toward couples may thus be seen as a response to couple power. Although the households we studied, unlike traditional or religious communes (Kanter,

1972, 1973), did not develop formal mechanisms to regulate couples and place them under the control of the group, they do exert group pressure on couples not to withdraw and to form relationships (coalitions) with others. This pressure may occur even in relatively loose households around casual couples. One member reported:

> There were subtle hostilities from almost everyone being directed at their partial withdrawal from the rest of use into their own world. It came out in criticisms of their relationship by various people...It's true that if you start to get into a heavier-than-usual relationship with anyone, you should have every freedom to let it develop. Living in a commune, however, carries with it a responsibility to maintain a certain amount of awareness of where everyone else is at and how what you are doing is affecting the total group.

The delicacy of couple existence

Many couples thus find that the issue of their withdrawal versus the commitment and participation in community activities is their first confrontation with the meaning of communal life to their relationship. Experiencing the withdrawal of the privacy and psychic space they may have been accustomed to, many couples report an initial defensive overreaction. Their first encounter with the super-individual entity "the commune," which makes claims on them, makes them feel they have given too much up already, while their housemates paradoxically feel they have not yet given enough. If they ideologically desire to deprivatize their relationship, and not enter the commune as a unit called a "couple," they will also face additional pressure to live up to their beliefs. Some couples react to these demands by trying to reestablish autonomy over a smaller space. They may fix up and spend time in their private living space as though it were a separate complete home -- in several cases with small kitchen units and private phone so that the couple could reduce its need to leave its own quarters. The couple may create informal barriers to entering their rooms except at certain times or under certain conditions, or do their household chores together. Many houses get into difficult situations dividing up the space. While they wish to break down private ownership of space, they end up by rigidly respecting each person's right to a private space. Sharing becomes a symbol for the loss of autonomy many people feel when entering a commune, and property and space become the overt focus for deeper issues of commitment to collective versus private or couple concerns.

The major problem for couples, then, is to modulate their involvement in their relationship and their involvement with the others. Some develop and reinforce their boundaries so as to continue their solidarity as a couple, but other couples do not survive the collective experience.

PARENTS: THE DILEMMAS OF SHARING RESPONSIBILITY

Parent-child relationships are affected by the structure of a communal household in many of the same ways male-female couples are, by the parents' diminished sovereignty over the household, the presence of an audience and potential coalition partners, and pressures for individuation and autonomy. For parent-child units as well as couples, the communal household replaces the nuclear family's limited exchange of goods and services with a market place. Since the family's exchange is usually one-sided,

with many more goods and services flowing from the parent to the child than in the other direction, many parents, indeed, come to communal households seeking the market place: a sharing of child care responsibilities, a provision of inputs from other adults, the presence of others to take over when the parent is depleted -- that is, a change from obligatory exchange, in which the parent must give to the child, to a free market, in which the parent can choose when and how to give to the child because he or she is one of a number of resource-holders. One reported:

> The house took the pressure off. When I was the only Mommy I lost my temper a lot more. There was no relief. Living alone with them I was terrified that I'd get sick. There was absolutely no one else. Here if I have some problem, there is always someone to take care of them. So relating to the children is a lot freer. I do it because I want to, not because I have to.

Generally others helped through casual babysitting, performing household tasks in the communal division of labor, and distracting children's attention. While the diffusion of dependence helped parents with their burdens, it also provided children with numerous and easily available alternative relationships within the home, as a mother indicated:

> It's a very positive thing. Children should be raised this way; they shouldn't be isolated. Adults aren't isolated, even in the nuclear family. But the child is in a prison... Communes are the feeling of neighborhood that there used to be; you had your group of kids after the day in school. You don't see it in suburbia; you don't see it too much anywhere. But here we have it.

It is significant that this mother used the word "neighborhood" for the commune rather than family. In practice, others in the house did not function as parent surrogates so much as parent helpers. Parents had major child care responsibilities ("I'm chief honcho where my child is concerned," said one) and generally had to take the initiative in getting others, especially others without children of their own, involved in the child's life. Rarely did parents report in interviews that they had as much help as they wanted. One single father, for example, felt he did "98%" of the child care in his household, even though others frequently took care of his four year old daughter when he went out.

But it is also clear from our interviews that the parents themselves often erected barriers to the involvement of others. The diffusion of responsibility and intimacy seems to be threatening for communal parents perhaps even more than for communal couples, who may be consciously or unconsciously looking for ways to disengage. The parents we studied were concerned about the loss of control and loss of intimacy that sharing child care might entail; they reported difficulty "letting go," asking others to help, giving up even burdensome chores. One woman who had lived alone with her husband and four children before creating a communal household indicated that she

found it much harder to let go of parent-related jobs than other domestic chores she had enjoyed performing, even when the jobs were routine and inconvenient, like getting the childrens' bath at night. A woman in another house seemed to exude ambivalence, She expressed a desire to give up her "fused identity" with her child but indicated pleasure over the strength of the bond that created. She said she didn't like the assumption that parents were responsible for everything and wished others would do more, but she herself limited the amount of input others could have. She wished others would spontaneously do things for her daughter but was reluctant to ask for help. Her statements indicated the ideologically-oriented desire to involve others but the risk of losing control that made her hold back:

> I'm trying to loosen possessive feelings around a kid, giving up some of that. Letting other people parent her, the decision to give up my total investment in her creation, was hard. I can no longer project myself and invest in making her my ideal. It's risky in a way, to give up some control.

Parental control, like the control of couple members over one another, is more difficult to maintain in a household shared with others, whether or not others become closely involved in the daily work of child care. The presence of others complicates parent-child relationships and diminishes parental sovereignty at the same time that it offers relief from exclusive task responsibility.

Audience effects and "reflected identity"

The presence of others affects parental control in several ways. First, others act as a virtually ever-present audience to parent-child interactions, especially at meals and in play situations. Many communal parents report greater self-consciousness about rule making and rule enforcing when others are there to witness them. They indicate a greater concern with demonstrating consistent, reasoned discipline, in part because of awareness that the child may have a champion if the parent mistreats him/her. For some parents, this means that they hold back, try to control their anger, and refrain from disciplining or restricting the child as severely as they might without an audience. One mother, on the other hand, reported that she felt she was growing inconsistent in her treatment of her child because of her self-consciousness before the others in the group. At the same time, some parents are also aware of how the child might look to the others and thus what kind of judgment the others might be making about the parent qua parent. (It was surprising how often this issue of reflected identity arose even among people experimenting with a new culture.) One mother reported her feelings that what her son does reflects on her:

> Every time Jonathon (three years old) spills milk I feel I have to get in there and wipe it up fast. I consider it my responsibility; it's a test of my ability as a mother to try to teach him not to do it.

Another woman indicated she was sensitive to other adults'

opinions of and expectations for her child; at first she tried unsuccessfully to put pressure on him to behave more perfectly in front of the others.

A concern for the opinions of others may sometimes cause a parent to overreact to a child's actual or imagined misbehavior, particularly if those others have equal claims on the household territory. This story was told by the veteran of several communal situations about her first experience:

> Dan (nine years old) was the oldest child. He moved in with a new child who was just crawling and getting into things. He had had a separate room, and then he had to share. Gary was 1 1/2 years younger than Dan. They were different kinds of kids -- Gary was more energetic, Dan more long-term and concentrated. Everyone had expectations of Dan as the older kid: to be the intermediary between adults and kids, to take care of the younger ones, to be super. (He began to make hideouts to hide in, to get away from the pressure.) One day Dan and Gary were playing wildly in the living room, and Gary fell and hurt his head. Dan said he had fallen. Leslie, Gary's mother, said Dan had pushed him, I believed her. I didn't see where Dan was coming from, as he maintained for months that he hadn't pushed Gary. I went crazy at the time. One night Leslie and Fred (Gary's father) and another person in the house persuaded me to take Dan to a child therapist and to go to one myself -- I was so invested in other people's opinions...I later understood that Leslie's fears of Gary getting hurt were a projection of her own violence. I also found out long after, from another adult, that Dan was telling the truth.

Parental identification with children's images in the presence of others, then, sometimes means that parents experience their limited control more acutely. The audience makes them aware by rellection of what control they can and cannot exercise over their children. In one household composed of many middle-aged people experienced with kids, others tried to help counter parent-child reflected identity. In this situation, the mother felt her six year old son was bad, and sought advice from others at eetings about what to do. Much of the meetings during one summer were taken up with this process, getting the mother to let go of her idea that her child was bad, and that it reflected on her. She felt she had to constantly watch the kid; the others said she should loosen up, and tried to find ways to support her to do this. As people spent more time with that kid, it took pressure off her, enabled her to relax more, and he was with other people, not acting up, therefore allowing the mother to see that maybe he was not really that bad, or that the others could control him or reward him so that he wasn't obnoxious.

If the presence of an audience, then, heightens issues of "reflected identity" -- the concern that one family member will be "judged" by the behavior of another, it also makes possible new alliances that affect parent-child relations. The others represent potential coalition partners for both parent and child and make possible a number of relationship configurations. First,

the others may attempt to gain influence over either the parent or the child -- in the first case by indicating that the parent should exert more control over the child, in the second, less. To the extent that a parent desires a positive relationship with a third party, then, he or she may be relatively easily induced to occasionally turn against his or her child, to "side with" the other against the child, in order to make the child's behavior acceptable to the other so that the parent herself will be acceptable. (This is a classic technique of domination discussed in Simmelian coalition theory: for one to set two who have a relationship against one another.) To point out a child's misbehavior under these circumstances is to gain a potent weapon of control over the parent, as the earlier story of one mother's accusations sending another to a therapist demonstrates. On the other hand, to try to break the fusion of identity of parent with child, to induce the parent to "let go," is to reduce the magnitude of an exclusive relationship threatening to the group and to make the child available for coalitions with, and influence by, others. Several parents reported feedback or criticism from others in the group that they were too possessive and controlling of their children, or too lax and easy on them.

Separate relationships and multiple rule-makers

Parents also experienced loss of control over the child's experiences, environment, and relationships. Parents were no longer the principal rule-makers and rule-enforcers for their children. Other adults had the right to make and enforce rules for the joint household, to make demands on the children, to provide experiences for them and form relationships with them. In a few instances, though rare, other members of the household encouraged the child to do something that contradicted parental rules or behaved toward the child in ways that violated the spirit of the parent's desires. Parents could avoid this only to the extent that they could control the other adults in the household -- an unlikely occurence among a group of adults valuing egalitarian participation. Thus, for parents to remain in force as principal rule-makers and rule-enforcers for their children, they must also have power in the commune, be able to enforce rules for the other adults. What in the private family is a relatively simple (structurally) matter of negotiation between two parents or a strong stand by one in order to define norms affecting a child becomes in the commune an even more complicated political situation.

In a political context, the demands or requests of parents concerning their children may, indeed, sometimes be seen as power moves on their part, as a way to gain special privilege or undue influence in the group and may in extreme cases be responded to in political ways regardless of the real needs of the child. More than one parent in houses with relatively few kids reported his or her difficulty convincing others in the house that the children were not just miniature adults but had special needs and required special kinds of behavior. For example:

> We have been easier on the kids than the other adults in the house would believe we should be, in terms of sharing responsibility...It's been a disagreement between us and

> the other adults about whether a six or seven year old child is capable of doing an adult's share or any very substantial share of a large household's chores.

Some of this difficulty could have resulted from the ignorance of nonparents and/or their unwillingness to engage in special efforts; but part of it may also be attributable to a reluctance to acknowledge the special status of child and, by implication, parent. In houses with relatively more children and parents -- so that the threat of special status was reduced -- parents did not report the same phenomenon.

Many parents complained of their inability to control other adults' treatment of their child at the same time that they ideologically espoused the communal principle that children are entitled to have their own relationships. Said one parent:

> I lack control over other people and how they relate to him. Living here means he can learn anything from anybody and I can't tell them how to relate.

Parents generally had strong feelings about the ways others related to their children; their reactions to the relationships sometimes included frustration at their lack of control. Complaints about others' behavior toward a child were frequent; overt expressions of jealousy about anothers' positive or strong relationship with a child were rare and were perhaps channelled into complaints. Typical complaints included: adults too impatient with children; someone who didn't understand children "rough-housing" with them inappropriately at bed-time; adults behaving too harshly with the children. Other issues revolved around concern that the child was disliked or ignored by the grown-ups and the parent's inability to change this. In general, we found that communal parents often do not and cannot act as intermediaries for their children in relationships because of the close proximity of others in the household. The parents do not alone control the boundaries of the household -- who enters and leaves, what happens when -- and are not always present when crises occur. The norms of the situation also promote direct confrontation of issues among all members of the household, such that both adults and children are encouraged to go directly to the other to discuss a problem and not go through the parent. Far from automatically being the child's emissary and intermediary to others outside the family, then, in some cases, parents may not even be the first to know what issues occur around their children, and they may be limited in their ability to effect change.

One outcome is that children gain more autonomy and a measure of individuation similar to that occurring for couples when third parties are available to form relationships outside of the intimate dyad. Children quickly learn what resources and relationships exist for them in the house and, often, how to manage them themselves. Sometimes other adults besides the parent may intervene on the child's behalf, and it is not at all clear that final authority or final knowledge always rests with the parent. Children themselves choose which adult to confide in or

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ask for advice. In one group, an 11-year-old formed a strong friendship with a woman in her twenties, who replaced the mother as principal "expert" on what was happening with Monica and what would be best for her. Under such circumstances parents occasionally felt that other people could influence their children more readily than they could. According to one report:

> Keith was in the five year old demand stage. Two other women decided they didn't want to be ordered around. They taught him to say please and thank you. They accomplished this -- a nonparent can do this more easily -- in the space of about ten days.

Parental concern about the relationship between children and others was exacerbated in communal households with more than one set of parents. Competition and conflict over what kinds of child rearing standards would prevail was frequent. In one household, two mothers with young daughters fought about child rearing strategies; one felt the other too permissive, the other thought the first too strict. The feeling that permissiveness or authority in the other is bad for a child is hard to deal with for people with a rhetoric of freedom. Since the two mothers shared child care, they also had to cope with the results of the other's style. One of them finally moved out, saying that while she intended to continue living communally, she wanted to be the only parent next time, pointing up the politics of the situation. Another household broke up over the issue. Two couples had infants and were uncomfortable with the personal style of the other set of parents and what impact that style would have on their ability to influence their child as they wished. In another case, the conflict between parental styles resulted in different sets of rules being enforced for the children of each set of parents. This group included 13 kids of ages 5-16. Its major issue of the first year was a conflict between two sets of parents. One was very strict and controlling, making demands on the children to work; the other felt that kids could decide all things. Their children shared a room, and over time the conflict built up. One kid would have to go to sleep while the other sat outside and watched TV. This situation was resolved by the children forming a coalition to defeat both sets of parents. They began to establish their own culture and make rules for themselves.

Parental domains

We have already indicated that some parents retain, willingly or unwillingly, a number of child care responsibilities, but over all of the groups studied, it becomes clear that it is not particular duties and chores that distinguish parents from nonparents in communal households. Depending on the household, nonparents are likely to be found at any time with children, and children are likely to form close relationships with at least one person other than a parent. What does distinguish the domain remaining more exclusively in parental hands is the parent's legitimate involvement with the general boundaries of relationships and experiences for the child. Couples may preserve their own domain by excluding others from sexual intimacy or full emotional disclosure, but these are areas culturally considered inappropriate

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for the maintenance of parent-child bonds. Instead, parents tend to reserve for themselves the rights to protect their children and to punish them.

The kinds of protection reported included speaking up for children when they were unfairly treated (one mother called it "running defense for my child"), trying to get them the extra things they needed from the house or others, or defending children against the criticism of others. Parents often preserved a space and time of the day that was known to be exclusively for the parents and children to be together, alone and safe from interruption -- often in the children's room just before bedtime, when other house members would have retreated to private activities and the house was quiet, or in the parents' room if the children's room was shared with nonsiblings. The specialness of these times of safety and closeness are manifest in interviews with communal children.

Severe threats and also the meting out of sanctions for rule violations tended to be reserved as parental rights and privileges. Both threats of punishment and punishments, for example, remained in the parental domain. Thus, threats of "no TV," or "no sweets," tended to be asserted only by parents. Generally, the invoking of sanctions tended to be such an exclusive privilege of parents that if other communal adults wandered into this domain, they encountered great hostility from parents. In one instance an adult attempted to put a child into a cold shower as punishment for an infraction (an infraction compounded with a temper tantrum). The child's mother interfered and expressed considerable anger at the other adult. In another instance when a child's mother was absent, another communal adult punished an eight year old girl for a noise violation by refusing to let her go caroling that night during the Christmas season. The mother, who knew that the child had been preparing and looking forward to the event for two months, was furious with the adult when she returned home. Only in cases where the parent had explicitly conferred the privilege of invoking sanctions against children upon certain adults was such an adult activity permitted. The bestowal of this privilege occurred rarely. In only one household did the mother specifically allow certain male communal members to invoke sanctions with her children. These male members exercised this privilege in telling children in cases of rule violations to go to their rooms and to leave the table at dinnertime. But it was clear that they were acting for the mother.

Parenting in the presence of others, then, is complex and, like coupling, involves its own delicate balances: help with child care versus retention of the exclusiveness of parenting; concern for the child versus concern for the reactions of others; children's separate relationships with others versus parents' desires to protect their children; letting go of burdens versus losing control. Parents both applaud their children's exposure to a variety of relationships and styles and mourn the loss of parental sovereignty. A single father said:

> In comparison to a nuclear family, the fact that communes bring a child in contact with a variety of people of different styles, ages, tastes, makes communal upbringing better.

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> But there are times when communes seem to leave out extreme love and tight relationships; I feel these are important in a person's life. The multiplicity of relationships of the nuclear family. Fay (his daughter) and I have gained a great deal, and also we've lost a little too.

CHILDREN: MULTIPLE RELATIONSHIPS AND MULTIPLE RULE-MAKERS

The presence of others appears to offer a number of freedoms and skills for children while adding other constraints. (we include in the category of "children" ages 4-12.) Children have a variety of adult relationship partners, and, in forming multiple relationships, learn to make choices and learn to express themselves easily to grown-ups. Children themselves become the audience for a number of adult-adult exchanges over the dinner table or at house meetings, including conflict between their own parents and the others. Parents and other adults become demystified by this process; their own weakensses and norm violations are exposed. Urban communal households shield children from sex and drugs (though drug use itself is infrequent) and occasionally from heavy or late house meetings -- but not from discussion about these matters or other affairs or adult life. Aware of house conflicts, children also become aware of times when their own parents are in the wrong or have mispleased others or have failed to get their way on issues; the "front" of parental strength is more difficult to maintain. Older children may even form coalitions on the side of others rather than their parents. In addition, the presence of others and therefore the enlarged size and complexity of the household mean that children have to learn to "speak up" in order to be heard, to be persuasive and interpersonally skilled in order to get something they want. In a comment that echoed other parents, one mother said of her five year old who had lived communally for a year:

> He's more sophisticated, less of a baby. He's more aware of dynamics between people. It's easier for him to talk to people and to express himself in words -- between parents and children, there's a lot of nonverbal stuff. With the others, he's learned a lot about expressing himself, and he's exposed to so much.

The possibility for multiple relationships and observation of adults in communal households also brings the possibility for constraints -- particularly when children are scarce and the household is numerically as well as socially adult-dominated. As parents lose exclusive control, other adults gain the right to impose control over their relationships with children and the household. More people in the house may also mean more people telling the child what to do, observing deviance, and imposing constraints as well as providing knowledge, company, and support.

The "Cinderella Effect": children and rule-making

Children of 4-12 almost universally experienced communal living as a situation involving "too many bosses" or "too many people saying 'stop that'" -- especially in houses with few other children and crowded quarters. We can call this the "Cinderella effect" ("Cinderella, do this; Cinderella, do that")

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to capture the experience of multiple rule-makers and rule enforcers. As one child explained:

> Sometimes it's not so fun to live here because there's a lot of people that chase you around and tell you what to do... Like they tell me sometimes when I'm sneaking food, they say 'stop eating all the food, it's almost dinnertime.' And sometimes they say, 'don't stand on the chairs, that chair is very weak,' or 'don't run around the dining room table when we're eating because it shakes and spills all the coffee and the milk and the water.'

In the commune, the child encounters a myriad of rule-makers. Virtually every adult in the commune, in addition to the child's parents, functions to some degree as a rule-maker prescribing proper behavior in the home for children. Soon after entry, new communal residents generally formulate rules governing his or her private space. These rules often pertain to adults; but, given the presence of children in the commune, they invariably govern specific usage of the space by the child. These rules specify whether the individual's room may be used by children, under what conditions (if any) it may be used by children (to watch TV, to play in), at what times of the day it may be used by children, if the owner must be present or must be absent during the usage period, whether prior permission must be requested, to whom one must request permission (to the owner or in the case of absence, to a parent), and how one requests such permission (by knocking or orally). Generally such rules clarify the meaning of such territorial boundary markers as the closed door -- whether this signal means the room is completely off limits, or whether it means that the child may knock to request permission to enter.

In addition to rules about private space, each communal member may formulate rules governing use of private property -- e.g. possessions both in the private space and in the communal spaces. Following an individual's move into a communal household, he or she often 'donates' property temporarily (usually in the form of furniture, kitchenware, TV's or stereos) to the group. What was formerly an individual's separate property now becomes, in a sense, "community property" in that it is relocated in a communal area and is henceforth available for use by all communal members. However, usage, maintenance and control of the property, is still a prerogative reserved by the individual owner and is frequently exercised whenever such property is being misused. As children have often not yet learned the taken-for-granted adult usage patterns of property, rules for children's property use are frequently formulated.

Adults make rules for children either singly or jointly. Rules that are formulated singly generally concern private space and private property (private property located in both the private and communal areas). Rules that tend to be formulated jointly, as in group meetings, often concern children's responsibility for maintenance of communal space and children's usage of communal space.

Because of their limited mobility, resources, and short

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'work' day, children often spend considerable time at home and are frequent users of communal space. This frequency and the quantity of paraphenalia involved (toys, games, paper, crayons, and so forth) means that kids are frequently violators of rules of neatness and spatial order. Or, as one parent explained:

> One of the problems here with Sherri that is abrasive is the mess she makes and how responsible she is for cleaning up after herself...being forgetful and people not liking that, particularly so in the TV room which is a commonly used room by a lot of people. There's sort of a trail of Sherri throughout the house. We've tried keeping boxes in certain places where she could keep all her stuff, but other people, aside from me and Dick (her father) get after her if it's annoying to them.

In meetings, rules are formulated setting forth explicit expectations for children in terms of their maintenance of the communal space. Because of the democratic air we have mentioned which reigns in many households dictating that all communal members, male and female alike, participate in household tasks, and because children so frequently violate communal structural order, they too are expected to perform specific household maintenance tasks. Children's chores range from the general (picking up after themselves in the common areas) to more specific cleaning the common areas once each week (vacuuming, dusting, washing ashtrays, straightening up).

In some houses it was after the pressure of several communal members that the rotation of household tasks came to specify the degree of participation required of kids. As the mother of several children explained:

> The kids' lack of responsibility got to some of the people, especially to two particular adults who were annoyed that the kids did not do much around the house. Since all the people here had shared responsibilities the adults felt that the children too should have shared responsibility, cleaning the house and picking up after themselves. Previously the kids had had no stated responsibilities -- they were occasionally asked from time to time to do certain chores, but they were not included in the rotation of household responsibilities. So we had a group meeting and decided that the children should be included at the next meeting since we were talking about responsibilities in the house for them.

In this house all tasks were assigned different numbers of points. Each child was then assigned a required number of points (scaled according to their ages) which they had to accumulate for the week. Such a division of labor involving children in household maintenance tasks was commonly found in urban communes. And, children frequently voiced their awareness of the expectation of adult communal members that they 'do their chore' for the week.

Group meetings are also settings for rule-making about children's usage of communal space. The primary spatial violation by

children concerns noise. Often rules specify the types of noise permitted and in which areas, the hours when noise is prohibited (early morning, late at night), the types of noise-generating activities (parties, fighting) prohibited.

Rules may also define when the child must stop using communal space; bedtime is a time when children must vacate the communal areas. Although bedtime decisions are most often formulated by parents, occasionally others make such decisions at group meetings. One parent of several children reported:

> Children here were very much brought up by the group in that decisions even relative to bedtime were reached by the community. Bedtime has been a big bone of contention with the children...they have a very natural curiosity to be part of whatever is going on in the evening, at which point myself and the rest of the people had just had enough of kids. Most people here were not working 9 to 5 and instead worked in the house...they would be here in the afternoon when the children got home from school, and so by evening, they had had enough of kids.

Shared property is another arena in which others may set rules about use by kids. Such decisions sometimes concern community food: how much and what types of food children may eat. The case of a nine year old is illustrative:

> I'm only allowed to eat two or three pieces of fruit every day cause before I was eating like seven a day and sometimes people would get three bags of apples and two bags of oranges and the next day they'd be all gone. So people said to me not to eat as much and not to eat before dinner but you can eat when you come home from school. You can eat a certain amount of each different kind of food, not like seven oranges, but like one apple and one orange and one peach, like that.

In group meetings, rules are conveyed and made more explicit to children, and the role of nonparent others in controlling childrens' experiences is supported. If, for example, an adult has told a child not to enter a room without knocking, at a group meeting the adult may reinforce the rule public to the child. Often too, group meetings are settings where rules are evaluated -- those which have been formulated and made explicit may be judged to have failed, and new rules are then formulated to better deal with the issue. As a nine year old boy explains what happened to him:

> I'm not allowed to walk in people's room if their door's closed...But, if you do one mistake and then you do it again, maybe you do a mistake when you didn't know that rule and you say, 'I didn't know it.' And so they say, 'well, now you know it.' And then if you break it then, then they bring it up in the next meeting and then they talk about it and they they get an even bigger rule, like you can't even go into this room if the door's open.

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Rule-enforcing

The presence of many adults in the home territory ensures a large number of adults engaged not only in rule-making but also in rule-enforcing. Methods of rule-enforcing may include constant repetitions of the rule to the child, and the use of threats or sanctions. Repetition of a rule was the most common means of enforcement: "don't stand on chairs," "don't eat all the food before dinner," "don't interrupt," "pick up your things in the TV room and put them in your room." Threats frequently contained a contingent-responsibility clause: "If you break that, you'll have to pay for it(or fix it)" or "if you mess up my room when you come in here, then you'll have to clean it up." The threat generally functioned sufficiently as a deterrent so that threats tended to be rarely enforced. More severe sanctions, as we mentioned earlier, were reserved to parents.

The existence of the "Cinderella effect," having multiple rule-makers and rule-enforcers, may create various problematical situations for children, including inconsistency, ambiguity and contradictions. Difficulties arise because each adult communal member has a different set of expectations concerning what is appropriate child behavior and each adult has different difinitions of what constitutes an infraction. The noise issue highlights the different adults' sets of expectations and definitions of what constitutes "too much noise" on the part of children. What is an appropriate or acceptable noise level for children to many adults is often considered excessive noise by others. One mother said:

> There are adults here who react differently than I would. I can see encounters that are handled differently than I would handle them. Sometimes people are stricter or often less patient with noise. For instance, when the girls are making noise, someone might say 'you're making noise, you'll have to go do that somewhere else,' at a time when I probably wouldn't have even bothered to say that.

Different expectations and different definitions may result in inconsistent rule-enforcement. Thus, what a parent might consider an activity or action that falls within an acceptable range of child behavior, another communal adult may not. The child is faced with an inconsistency: the definition of the rule varies from adult to adult and similarly, the definition of their adherence to the rule varies from adult to adult. Rule-enforcement thus becomes a highly arbitrary process for children -- fixed at the whim of many different adults. Children often adjust to this and learn that adult standards differ and, depending on their ages, may also use these differences to make choices about which set of standards to ignore. But because adults have more power, children are likely to be called on all of their norm violations. In fact more authoritative behavior seems to come out around kids than any other area of communal life -- the release of authoritarian tendencies in a democratic social structure.

Rule-enforcement may also be contradictory. What some adults have explicitly allowed, others may have prohibited. Thus, a child may be permitted to watch television in one adult's room while the same act may be explicitly prohibited by another adult in the latter's room. Similar contradictory rule-enforcement arose for a 4 1/2 year

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old boy when his father was out one evening. His bedtime had been established by his father as 8 p.m. Another member, a woman whom the father had asked to put the boy to bed, enforced a 7 p.m. bedtime rule despite the boy's protestations to the contrary. In such situations the child is very often caught between "Scylla" and "Charybdis" -- maneuvering the waters between the "great powers" can be a frustrating task.

Differential degrees of enforcement also result. Some adults expect children to follow a rule strictly -- to do so under all circumstances at all times; others may assume that the rule is wide-range and that occasional infractions may pass unnoticed. The issue of children's interrupting behavior provides an example. Some adults may be unperturbed by children's interruptions; others may become explosive. In one commune, a male communal member becomes furious when eight year old Rick constantly interrupts at the dinner table. "Rick, be quiet," "Rick, don't interrupt me," "Rick, lower your voice," he tells him again and again. Another male communal member, Allan, however, expressed surprise when Rick is reprimanded for his interrupting. Rick's mother reported:

> Allan mentioned to me once that he sometimes wondered at our impatience with the kids because it seems to him that they are just being kidlike and that one expects kids to interrupt and not think about a conversation.

Differential enforcement may result from two different expectations of child behavior -- one that children are children and should be allowed to act accordingly, and the other that children are being socialized to learn adult behavior and should act as little adults. The first set of expectations tends to result in more permissive rule-enforcement; the second is generally invoked by people who would rather not bother with kids.

Another consequence of the presence of others as rule-makers and rule-enforcers is the likelihood that children will experience the condition of 'double jeopardy' -- having an infraction noticed more than once and being reprimanded more than once for the same offense. The large number of adults living in the communal home territory increases the likelihood that many will be present in the home territory at the same time. This simultaneously increases the likelihood that more than one adult will notice a child's rule-breaking offense during a short time period. Often then, more than one adult reprimands a child for the same offense -- scolding a child or asking him to follow a rule without realizing that another adult, just a few moments before, may have cited him for the same offense. Thus, adult Julie may ask six year old Ethan to pick up his toys in the living room only moments after adult Arthur has told him to do the same thing. The same condition of double jeopardy may also result when little Ethan is yelled at by one communal resident who then mentions to Ethan's mother that he has broken a rule. The result is then he is yelled at once by adult A and then again by his mother and/or father. Even 'triple jeopardy' may result for certain infractions when Ethan is yelled at once by adult A, again by a parent and a third time in a group meeting. This case is dependent on the seriousness of the infraction, the number of different occasions on which it has occurred, and the

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number of communal residents affected.

A variation on the theme of 'double jeopardy' arises when the child may be reprimanded by one adult to follow one rule (such as picking up his toys in the living room) moments after another adult has reprimanded him to follow a different rule (to clean up his mess in the kitchen). This epitomizes the consequences of the "Cinderella effect" -- "Cinderella, do this!" "Cinderella, do that!" "No, Cinderella, do this!" A child's response to this situation is described by a six year old's mother:

> What really drives Ethan crazy is if someone says to him 'Ethan, do this,' and somebody else has just said to him previously, 'Ethan, do this,' and he's in the process of doing that thing when somebody says, 'do this.' That really flips him out. That must be one of the most difficult experiences for him here.

Recourse to a higher court of appeal (e.g. parent) is rare for communal children; parents themselves make the decision to protect their children only in extreme circumstances and do not intercede for children unless greatly provoked. When another adult makes a rule or reprimands a child as rule-enforcement, that adult's word is law -- and generally not subject to amendment or reversal. One of the desires most frequently expressed by parents in communes with children and adults is that each communal adult member have a distinct relationship with the children. Parents encourage other adults to have 'their own' relationships to each child. This functions especially in terms of gripes -- that parents prefer adults to deal directly with the child rather than express it to them as middlemen. As one mother explained: "The norm here is if that child is bothering you, it's your problem, not mine. I don't want to hear about it. Deal with the child." Thus children do not have access to a higher court of appeal on rules and rule-enforcement generally -- except when other adults attempt to invoke serious punishment, as previously discussed. Children know that they are not encouraged to go to a parent to plead their case or to mitigate the sentence. Depending on their age, however, they <u>may</u> come to house meetings and complain of unfair treatment, just as any member can bring up a grievance; occasionally children have influenced a change of rules.

It must be recognized, of course, that the participation of each adult in rule-making and rule-enforcement for children depends on a number of variables, including length of time as communal resident, time spent daily in the home territory, familiarity with children in general and with those specific children, familiarity with child's parents, and view of children (as a special category or as little adults). The extensiveness of communal constraints on children and whether children face arbitrary adult domination varies also with the number of children and the degree of crowding in the household. More children and more space reduce the continual control fewer children in more cramped quarters face, partly because children gain their own territory and become a more critical mass for the household, so that their own status as children can be more easily acknowledged and incorporated into household routine. With more children, kids can form their own

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coalitions. It should also be noted that there can be areas of freedom as well as constraint for kids in communal houses: differentiation from parents, demystification of parents, multiple relationships with those adults available to children, and the ability to effectively use the disagreements between adults to gain freedom. Further, the wider visibility of adult behavior in such households and the generally more experimental behavior and permissive norms means that communal children often have behavioral freedoms their neighbors lack despite rules about use of space and property; one mother reported that her kids' friends find the commune a very free place "where they are allowed to swear."

But in general the presence of a large number of adults in the children's home territory, then, increases the likelihood of a large number of adults participating in rule-making and rule-enforcing vis a vis these children -- what has been here termed the "Cinderella phenomenon." This phenomenon consists of arbitrary, inconsistent and contradictory rule-enforcement where situations of 'double jeopardy' (reprimands for the same offense) are likely to occur and where the child has no recourse to a higher court of appeal. Under such circumstances parents are not the dominant sources of social control for their children in the household.

CONCLUSION

We have explored some of the impacts of the presence of others on the most intimate human relationships: those of couples and parents and children in communal households. The shift from essentially dyadic to larger group relations in the home adds a number of complex phenomena: audiences, alternative resources, coalition partners, interventions, and political jockeying. In each kind of relationship the primary tie may remain central for many people while they balance availability and responsibility to the others. The major effects in both cases involve a shift in the locus of social control. There are both greater opportunities for wider intimacy, more ties, sharing of chores and responsibilities, autonomy, and egalitarianism and a series of new issues with which couples, parents, and children must cope.

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